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Of Mice and Women: Beatrix Potter's Bluebeard Story, *Sister Anne*

Rose Lovell-Smith

Between 1902 and 1918, Beatrix Potter published twenty storybooks and two books of nursery rhymes for children. All were illustrated by Potter, all featured animal characters as protagonists, all were both popular and profitable. But it was over ten years before the author next published a storybook. During those ten years, Potter made many American friends; they wrote to her and came to visit because they admired her work, and she was attracted to them by their intelligent and well-informed appreciation of her achievements, professional interest in children's literature having begun rather earlier in the United States than it did in Britain.[1] Under pressure from an especially enthusiastic visiting American publisher, in 1929 Potter finally revised an earlier project, *The Fairy Caravan*, for publication with David McKay in Philadelphia. This was a very different book from her small picture books about small animals. *The Fairy Caravan* is a novel-length set of stories linked by a frame narrative about a traveling circus of animals, told by a variety of different animal narrators. But although the content of *The Fairy Caravan* is fantastic, the settings are not. The frame story is set in the area where Potter lived, and a cock, sheep, and dogs from her own farm are among the characters.

Because Potter claimed that its content was "too personal—too autobiographical" (qtd. in Linder 325) *The Fairy Caravan* was not published in Britain.[2] But its success in America was sufficient to encourage McKay to bring out two further long Beatrix Potter stories: *The Tale of Little Pig Robinson*, the last of her small-format picture books about animal characters, in 1930, and *Sister Anne* in 1932.

Sister Anne was originally intended by Potter for the *Fairy Caravan*, but rejected for that purpose by the publisher. It, too, appeared only in America, and it was illustrated by an American, Katharine Sturges.[3] This is an unusual

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work within Potter's oeuvre for many reasons: the story is atypically long, novella length; it retells a complete and familiar fairy tale[4]; and it anticipates an older child or adolescent—even adult—reader. The characters are all adult humans, yet the book retains a part of its original *Fairy Caravan* frame, in that it is narrated by mice. *Sister Anne* did not sell well (see Lear 409) and has received little attention ever since. Few Potter scholars have commented on it at any length, perhaps because her biographer Margaret Lane dismissed it in 1946 as virtually unreadable: "a pretentious failure" (139).[5]

This anomalous, and anomalously unsuccessful, Beatrix Potter story is the subject of my essay. I disagree with the negative view of *Sister Anne*—as, apparently, did Potter herself.[6] The book is hardly comparable in stature to her greatest work, but I have found it rewarding to study, both as a retelling of the traditional tale of Bluebeard, and as a late work by the author. While academic interest in Potter increases steadily, and was notably amplified by the volume *Beatrix Potter's* Peter Rabbit*: A Children's Classic at 100* (2002), edited by Margaret Mackey, I think it is still foreign to our idea of Potter that she could be a difficult writer. To demonstrate the interest of this late novel to readers today, I argue first that our readings of Potter should be prepared to accommodate the possibility that a book of hers might be difficult to read. This discussion lays the groundwork for my subsequent exploration of a number of facets of the experimental and challenging aspects of Potter's text in *Sister Anne*: the peculiar conjunctions of realism and folktale reference in the text; its varied language use and resulting marked instability of tone; and its Victorian intertext in a jocular Thackeray rewriting of the tale of Bluebeard. I conclude by arguing the responsiveness of this odd text to both feminist and modernist readings.

Perhaps for too long Potter's books have been conceived of as attractive mainly to small children, girls, middle-aged spinsters, sentimental old ladies, and so forth. In 1996 John Goldthwaite was certainly dismissive of some aspects of Potter's success because the "doting grandmother" and "maiden aunts" were the kind of readers he thought her work was calculated to attract.[7] I, on the other hand, am delighted to class myself among those sorts of reader—and, as such, I would like to question whether the past lack of critical interest in Potter's achievement in *Sister Anne* in part might be due to the unanticipated difficulty of reading this book. I hope to establish this point via the discussion of *The Tailor of Gloucester* which follows; a second reason for proffering a reading of *Tailor* at the outset of an essay about a very different book is to remind my readers that Potter presents the story of *Sister Anne* as told by mice, in a framing narrative more significant than may at first be apparent.

To illustrate these points, I suggest that it is quite difficult to read Potter's picture of the elegantly dressed late eighteenth-century lady mouse which appears on page 10 of the 2002 edition of *The Tailor of Gloucester*.[8] The size and subject matter of this illustration seem to appeal in terms which might also invite its dismissal; it could be read as twee, sentimental, self-indulgently

fanciful, unabashedly pretty, and (sinister word) cute. The illustration, after all, is not just small itself, it is also a kind of joke miniature portrait of an extremely small animal—so that if Potter's grace, skill, and complexity are indeed recognized here, their effects on the reader are likely to be simultaneously negated by recognition of their exertion in favor of both an impossibility, a mere child's fantasy, and an unimportant subject. But perhaps here, as in the case of Wordsworth's over-simple poetic tales in the *Lyrical Ballads*, there is a kind of insignificance and simplicity which may be ironically proffered, and might be best accepted as a test of the reader: "Do you have the qualities to rise to this reading challenge?"

If, instead of smiling at and dismissing this charming picture, we take it in and wonder what it has to say to us, that does not seem to me such an easy question to answer. A formal Potter animal portrait like this has great conviction; in fact, it can almost startle the viewer. It may be read as a slightly mad kind of work of art: a vision of the world we could see as alienating or as alienated, as radically remade, as satiric, or as surreal—although this is not a surreality which displaces grand and over-familiar cultural symbols into inappropriate spaces. Instead the idiom is feminine, gently humorous, Victorian realist, domestic, and intimate. The picture's main effect is to slide the animal and human on top of each other into a single image, as in much of Potter's work, where verbal or visual narrative (usually both) combine to situate human nature and animal nature as uncomfortably close to each other, as looking uncomfortably like, yet unlike, each other, and as unstable, even interchangeable, in their differences. As such, the lady mouse with her mirror operates in a similar cultural field to that of a late-Victorian political cartoon, where a near-realistic lion, but with human accoutrements and expressiveness, might represent Britain; a bear, Russia; and so forth. But this Potter image appears to have no kind of allegorical content, it speaks to human qualities (creativity, love of dress, pride in appearances, vanity) not usually assigned to animals—unlike the courage of the lion, the strength of the bear, and so forth—and it shrinks into an even smaller world the domestic interior setting common in children's book illustration.

Yet viewers may recognize in this picture allusion to the gratified self-contemplation of Narcissus, a radical displacement of the traditional motif of female vanity, a faint suggestion that Velásquez's seventeenth-century nude Venus with mirror and attendant Cupid is being redrawn into a very proper little Venus who keeps a firm grasp on her own (mirror) image. We might also, noting in the background a (male?) viewer, recognize an allusion to the male gazing on female beauty whose presence (as John Berger would later point out in *Ways of Seeing*) is virtually always implied whether depicted within, or assumed to stand outside of, a painting of a nude woman in Western traditions of visual art.[9] However, the viewer may also suspect a joke here, as the naked female figure of vanitas depicted with mirror in Renaissance art is here represented by a naturally unclothed mouse elaborately clothed as human, while her mouse viewer, albeit unclothed, is disqualified, as an animal, from human constructs

of either nudity or gender. Lissa Paul has shown that this painting has a more recent intertext in Millais's painting *Cherry-Ripe*, and fits into another tradition, the depiction of the charms of childhood innocence (64). Also recognizable here might be an allusion to the fashion for period costume in earlier children's book illustration, as associated with Kate Greenaway.

The ground and background of this picture, however, does serve as a signifier of male vanity expressed through fine dress. The mouse with mirror is seated on an elaborately embroidered waistcoat—one very like that later depicted on pages 53 and 55 of *The Tailor of Gloucester*, which is to be worn by the Mayor on his wedding day.[10] Moreover, the preceding illustration on page 9 of *Tailor* depicts a male mouse, with attendant mouse tailors (and *two* mirrors) trying on a waistcoat and coat evidently being created in imitation of the Mayor's wedding outfit.[11] This picture solidifies into "reality" through art the Tailor's passing fantasy that his scraps of leftover fabric are cut so small as to be only suitable for dressing mice. It also provides a male counter to the traditional connotations of feminine vanity and self-regard in the female mouse picture on page 10—especially as the male mouse trying on the waistcoat and coat is seen to smile so complacently at his own reflection.

Further contextual associations might be made with the lady mouse illustration, such as that the close-up view of the embroidered surfaces of the waistcoat suggests magnification, perhaps as it might be found in embroidery designs and patterns, or in the depiction of small creatures in natural history illustration. Making elaborate clothes out of scraps of leftover fabric recalls the labor of the female relatives, girls, servants, and governesses who designed and sewed dolls' clothes; while Joseph Wright of Derby's great painting of "Two Girls Dressing a Kitten by Candlelight" (c. 1768–70) might remind us that Potter's clothed animals did also sometimes have real-life equivalents among children's pets.

In terms of Potter's story, the mice shown in these and similar pictures are never merely decorative. They take part in the visual subplot of *The Tailor of Gloucester*, for these elegant little animals must also be among the many mice-tailors who assist the Tailor in finishing the Mayor's wedding coat on time; it seems that the transformation of a plain little brown-furred worker mouse into a gentleman or lady mouse is easily achieved in the mouse-world by purloining and putting together scraps from the Tailor's worktable. For a mirror-world or underworld containing a complete mouse society imitative of human society is painted into place in this book, and in it we can follow the preparation of the miniature imitation of the Mayor's outfit (see pictures of the embroidered waistcoat and red coat on pages 42 and 46) as well as other items of clothing. But it is impossible to read this mouse-world as in any way a slavish imitation of *Tailor*'s harshly class-hierarchized eighteenth-century human society, where, as we know, a tradesman who fell ill might easily starve and die. These mice are not only generous in spirit—more than repaying the Tailor for saving the lives of many of their number from his cat Simpkin—they are also a cooperative band of subversives. As M. Daphne Kutzer remarks, *The Tailor of*

Gloucester is like Potter's other books, "coded texts or palimpsests—narratives that read one way on the surface and another way beneath. What they encode are complaints against hierarchy, authority, and power" (12). Our glimpses of *Tailor*'s self-entertaining, enterprising, skilled, industrious, busily and actively imitative/parodic underworld suggest no desire to replicate or mirror-image human social class distinctions. Rather, they show us secretively scavenging mice workers whose identical appearance facilitates changing roles for fun, subverting class difference by their collaborative creative labor and ingenuity.

Apart from the question of Potter's difficulty and complexity, then, my other reason for proffering this discussion of *The Tailor of Gloucester* is simply to remind my readers that when Potter presents the story of *Sister Anne* as told by mice, she should be taken to mean *mice*: significant characters like those depicted in *Tailor*. This "Bluebeard" will be a scary story for small but sophisticated animals. And, as seen, *Tailor* does contain an image of Simpkin interrupting a mouse singing-and-sewing session (42–44), such as experienced Potter readers might imagine the spinning mice in *Sister Anne* to be enjoying when they settle to storytelling. The songs the *Tailor* mice sing to tease their threatening eavesdropper make it clear that these are mice well versed in folklore, witty and purposeful performers. An earlier picture of three spinning mice (c.1892), reproduced in Linda Lear's recent biography, provides another visual guide to Potter's probable idea of the three mice cousins who pass the time with a story as they sit "in a window to spin" at the beginning of *Sister Anne* (5).[12] Mice who labor, who entertain themselves and each other with song and story, who dress magnificently in their time off—and who like to tease the cat they fear—are reminders that the subordinate, the infantilized, the feminized, the small and powerless, though commonly objects of predation and victimization, are not to be dismissed as nonentities.[13]

I turn now to *Sister Anne*, a book which also suggests analogies between the animal and the human world, and which positions its women characters in very similar ways to *The Tailor of Gloucester*'s depiction of its almost powerless, but still resistant, mice characters. As a retelling of a well-known fairy tale, this book reflects Potter's longstanding interest in folktales and folk rhymes and songs, an interest often evidenced in earlier publications. As Goldthwaite argues, Potter may have arrived at many of her plots by recombining motifs from Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories,[14] while *The Tailor of Gloucester* arose from a local oral tradition, told as a true story, although it somewhat resembles the Grimms' fairy tale about the elves who made shoes for the shoemaker.[15] *Sister Anne* is one of three of Charles Perrault's fairy tales retold by Potter: the others, unpublished during her lifetime, are "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood." [16] Like them, *Sister Anne* follows Perrault's original quite closely, but diverges from it more than do the other two—and includes a lot more history, and a lot more geography, than Perrault ever proffers.

To recap Potter's story briefly: In a castle on one side of a wide bay of tidal sands and narrow river channels lives a Baron Bluebeard, seven times widowed; on the other side of the bay, at Hundy, lives a wealthy widow with a farm, a peel tower (that is, a defensible stronghold), two sons, and two daughters. The widow's seventeen-year-old daughter Fatima agrees, perhaps too hastily, to marry Baron Bluebeard, and departs with him to his castle across the sands. But only five days after the wedding a carrier pigeon brings home a message, a plea for her older Sister Anne to visit. Sister Anne arrives alone at the castle. She finds the bride fearful, listless, and lonely, for she is effectively kept a prisoner in the upper parts of the castle by her often-absent husband. Fatima has also developed an unhealthy obsession—she suspects the castle has a secret room, as there are more windows visible on one of its outside walls than in the rooms she can access from inside. Further narration of Anne's life at the castle also makes clear to the sisters, and to readers, that Fatima has married a robber baron. Bluebeard maintains a band of armed and mounted followers who assist him in taxing and tolling tenants and travelers, protection and extortion rackets, cattle rieving, and other forms of violent theft.

But Potter's Sister Anne, very much the heroine of this tale, is a sturdy character. Her physical description aligns her with earlier Victorian heroines whose dark hair and complexions and vigorous bodies hint at their great strength of character: "a big dark browed capable woman, with strong arms, and a quick wit, and white teeth when she laughed" (50–51).[17] Anne sets to work to cook, to clean, to explore, and to cheer her sister, and meets in the kitchen a traditional fairy tale character, Bluebeard's only woman servant.[18] This elderly "cookmaid," Elspeth, advises that it is useless to attempt an escape without help from outside, and agrees to assist Anne and Fatima in the future by opening a small postern door into the ditch surrounding the castle when Anne sends her a certain token. The token is also of fairy-tale kind, as it is to reach the kitchen hidden in a bowl of soup.

After hearing that a newly wealthy local heiress is being much sought in marriage, the Baron's attitude toward his new wife changes. She is now in the way of his next strategic alliance and destined to be the next victim of his serial wife murders. The following day he leaves his keys with Fatima—or wants to, but Sister Anne wisely pockets them herself. Anne also succeeds in getting hold of the keys on the second day. But on the third day, the Baron manages to give his keys to Fatima secretly, and while Potter does not narrate the opening of the bloody chamber, Anne's discovery of her sister lying in a faint on its threshold leaves us sure that both sisters are now aware of its traditionally grisly contents. Sister Anne, who had wisely equipped herself for her visit with a basket of homing pigeons, sends one back with a plea for help, and proceeds to store fuel, food, and water upstairs. When the Baron returns, the emotions of both women reveal that they now know his secret, and their own likely fate. There's no need for a tale-telling key, though the Baron does ask for his keys back and claims to smell grease and to see a bloodstain on them. But in

this crisis, Anne succeeds by luck, courage, and good management in getting herself and her sister safely away upstairs where the interior arrangements of the castle, which previously made it easy for the Baron to keep the two women imprisoned, now make it easy for them to keep intruders out. However, by now two further pigeons have failed to fly home, having been taken by birds of prey.

But the fourth and last bird survives its journey, and the arrival at Hundy of Anne's message causes her two brothers to coordinate a rescue. One organizes armed assistance for an attack on the castle, while the other, who has earlier secretly entered the postern door (opened for him by old Elspeth), kills the porter Wolfram, makes contact with Anne and Fatima, and opens the castle doors to a troop of armed men sent from Kentdale by his brother. When Baron Bluebeard and his robber band arrive home, they are met by the armed men hidden in the castle, while behind them the Baron's exasperated tenants rise in rebellion, further assisted by armed men from the widow's farm. All of the robbers are killed, and the castle is burned and abandoned. Fatima, we hear, makes another happy and prosperous marriage. The one remaining castle tower is still known locally as Bluebeard's Cupboard, and is rumored to be haunted. But Anne, it appears, has no further story.

I do not want to claim that *Sister Anne* is an overlooked masterpiece. There are good reasons why readers have rejected this book, for it has disconcerting, even estranging, effects. Like Anne Thackeray, Lady Ritchie, in her collection of tales called *Bluebeard's Keys* (1875),[19] and like Elizabeth Gaskell in "The Grey Woman" (1861), Potter fleshes out the bare bones of a gruesome folktale with all the conventional trappings of Victorian domestic realism.[20] Chronologically suggestive details, geographically precise settings, archaic language, expanded descriptive passages, and "colorful" dialogue all slow down Perrault's sparely plotted tale, while encounters with additional characters expand its incidents and expound its historical contexts. Social and economic relations in local society are firmly established; by the time we have finished this book, we know much about how these people live, and we know pretty well what they live on. The setting is a medieval world of castles and strongholds, isolated farms (which also need to have their own defenses), small towns and hamlets, poor cottages and hovels. Details of Anne and Fatima's clothing, of arms and armor, of the castle's interior architecture, of furnishings and household items, are all precise.

But Potter's adherence to the generic conventions of realism can be only uneasily accommodated within a familiar fairy tale. True, there is no magic—the enchanted key of Perrault's tale becomes a bunch of ordinary household keys. But the Baron Bluebeard does have a blue beard, and his young bride and eighth wife is named Fatima, the usual stage name of Bluebeard's wife, in defiance of all likelihood. Indeed, this name is one of the most markedly estranging effects of the tale, as Fatima's exotic name is often repeated even while her characterization, costume, occupations, and environment firmly locate her in the North of England sometime around 1400.[21] For these and similar reasons the tale repeatedly jars the reader's inner ear. There is an ef-

fect of generic mixing unexpected in itself, and perhaps especially so in the work of an author associated most strongly with writing for children. In the next part of this article, I discuss the many and disparate literary effects which simultaneously locate and anchor this Bluebeard tale in a particularized past and an existent, visitable locality, while at the same time alienating readers from the effect of realism in such multiple and varied ways that the book is made difficult to read, whether as realism or as anything else.

In plot, Potter's tale of Sister Anne harks back to Perrault. But the story also has a Victorian forerunner in the tale of Barbazure by Anne Thackeray's father, William Makepeace Thackeray, who published it in *Punch* in 1847 as one of a series of parodies of contemporary literature, "Punch's Prize Novelists."[22] Thackeray's comic piece is also based in the story of Perrault's Bluebeard. But its foregrounded narrative is a parody of the medieval romances of Sir Walter Scott and Scott's less distinguished imitators, such as Bulwer-Lytton and G. P. R. James. Potter thus complicates her realistic fiction by layering it. Underlying all is Perrault's horror tale, but fictionalized in such a way as to activate readers' understanding of the hard realities of medieval life in the insecure and disorderly borderlands of the North of England. Layered over this is Thackeray's "Barbazure," which is recalled to Potter's reader by many resemblances to Thackeray's parody,[23] and which (in 1932) must have evoked both Victorian nostalgia for the medieval past, and Victorian delight in the transgressive figure of Bluebeard—as well as Thackeray's ironic self-distancing from both that nostalgia and that suspiciously sympathetic delight. Further layering may be discerned as well: a layer of reference to north-west Lancashire landscapes and seascapes close to Potter's home, and yet another set of references to Potter herself and her "brand" as author, her characteristic talking-animal characters. Potter's reader is thus perpetually being jolted by recognition of pre-texts and by the accompanying challenge of having to become a new kind of reader—an uncomfortable reading experience exacerbated by the uncertainly shifting tone of the narrative.

Most strikingly, this instability of tone revolves around Potter's use of "tushery." Thackeray's "Barbazure" employed a resounding archaic vocabulary in deliberate mockery of the special kinds of archaicized language much used (and abused) in historical romance.[24] Thus one of Thackeray's minor characters rides "a prancing Andalusian palfrey," and wears a "surcoat of peach-coloured samite and a purfled doublet of vair"; his companion rides a "destrière of the true Norman breed" and, in a nonsensical case of literal and linguistic overloading, the "arblast, the mangonel, the demi-culverin, and the cuissart, of the period, glittered upon the neck and chest of [his] war steed" (502). The *Sister Anne* narrative echoes Thackeray on occasion, but also employs other kinds of archaic or (to most readers) unknown words—for Potter's nonstandard language is more varied than mere "tushery." When her narrator tells of "gaily caparisoned horses to bear knight and lady a-hawking" (8) or of the widow of

Hundy's "strapping sons" and "buxom daughters" (12), readers may recognize the artificial "olde-worlde" tone and familiar clichés of the "medievalized" historical romance (though the word "caparisoned" may well have come straight from Thackeray [50]). But when Potter speaks of Fatima's dowry, "a palfrey, a sumpter mare, and twenty head of cattle" (12), the now little-known words "palfrey" and "sumpter" mean what they say: Potter is always precise about animals.[25] Moreover, while Potter's narrator uses contemporary English colored by touches of historical romance, her characters speak together in much more consistently historical language, using the archaic "thou" and its obsolete verb forms and many other old words: "straightway" (18), "fain" (23), "hearken" (23), "bid" (24), and "bide" (27). Unlike Thackeray's language use, then, Potter's thus separates narrator from characters—a more modern narrator is telling us about a remoter past. Thackeray's purple narrative prose is as parodic as his pseudomedieval passages of dialogue; Potter, however, interconnects her two different streams of language by using the same uncommon words in both her narrative and the characters' speeches: words like "bid" and "bide," "benty" (7), and "green haugh" (11), "Craik" (11), "keck" (22), and "brig end" (23). These words, which would sound odd or archaic to a southern English reader, were (and sometimes are) still in use in northern England and Scotland. Echoes of local speech thus connect Potter's "olde worlde" characters to the reality of her local "here and now"—while at the same time dividing her implied readers into either local insiders or "off-comers" to the text.

Potter's story is thus repeatedly and strongly located by its language, as well as by its place names and topography. The site of her Bluebeard's castle is, I think, the southern shores above the tidal sands of Morecambe Bay. Her Kentdale and Brough are, I assume, the modern Kendal and Borough on Furness. This coastal landscape is quite close to where Potter, in 1932, had been living for nineteen years, having bought her first farm property in the Lake District in 1905, the farm called Hill Top, near the villages of Far Sawrey and Near Sawrey on Esthwaite Water. With many further land purchases following, and marriage to a local lawyer in 1913, Potter's self-transformation from Londoner to north-countrywoman and from children's author-illustrator to sheep farmer had been long confirmed, and in these roles she had made many local friends and contacts. Thus, whereas Thackeray locates his "Barbazure" in "the mountain-land between the Marne and the Garonne" (501)—which I take to mean nowhere but in the pages of historical romance—Potter's story, like other tales written or revised for *The Fairy Caravan*, happens close to where she lives and where, as she well knows, her works were eagerly reviewed in local conversation. Those whom she knew personally were particularly in the habit of looking for themselves, or for recognizable local characters, in her books.[26]

As remarked earlier, animal and human identities tend to be freely circulated in the course of a Potter narrative. In *Sister Anne* Potter makes essential to her plot some animal characters rather like those which have traditional functions in earlier Bluebeard stories: birds that utter warnings, pet dogs that

carry messages or look out for rescuers.[27] Anne and Fatima are, after all, saved by pigeons that fly home to Hundy when released. Animal and human identities are often also associated in *Sister Anne*—for instance, readers know that when the newly married Fatima leaves home with her bridegroom, she fills much the same category in her husband's mind as the two horses and twenty head of cattle which he has gained as her dowry. While Fatima as her husband's prisoner and potential victim is confined to only the upper parts of the castle, her own cattle are being successively slaughtered and eaten down at ground level; Potter's narrative makes clear the analogy, and I think she clothed her two heroines in the strange pointed, or horned, head-dresses of the period in order to play on their similarity to the cattle, a detail which Katharine Sturges picked up on and emphasized in her black-and-white drawings of the two women.

There is also a significantly close proximity to wild animals, and predators, in Fatima's wretched married life, for wildcats, jackdaws, and bats share the filthy abandoned upper regions of the castle with her. Here, too, Fatima tames a kitten and cares for the pigeons she brought with her from home, while her only other friend is a wounded hound. Potter's metaphors also often present humans as animals: thus Bluebeard is "a greedy gled in his eirie" (10)[28]; his trusted servant, the porter, is called Wolfram; Sister Anne on arrival is addressed by Wolfram as "pretty birdkin" (33); and the "bowed brown-hooded figure" of Elspeth the cookmaid in the castle kitchens is dehumanized to the point of near-animality—when Sister Anne, exploring the castle, first encounters her, the maid is "as startled as her cats but too lame and feeble to run" (51). Like an animal, the Baron is engaged in a constant search for food (he generally eats more animals), and like traditional Bluebeards in other tales, he is often absent and given to unpredictable returns. "It was a question of supplies," says Potter's narrative, which keeps the oppositional categories of human/animal and pet/food alive, overlapping, under threat, and always mobile throughout (65). The animal characters therefore introduce an element of self-reference into *Sister Anne.*

Potter's story also suggests its folktale origins by failing to specify when the tale is set. Instead, the storytelling mouse opens the tale with a traditional formula: "In days of old" (7). Other fairy tale and folktale motifs and narrative structures occur in *Sister Anne* as well: there is overall adherence to the Perrault plot; retention of the generic names of Bluebeard, Fatima, and Sister Anne; and a traditional old housewife who keeps Bluebeard's kitchen, and whose courageous assistance in the rescue is followed by her own death, also in line with tradition. As mentioned earlier, a message is conveyed to the kitchen by a token in a bowl of soup, and among many "animal helpers" are a cat that distracts Wolfram at one crucial moment, and the lame hound Rollo, who saves the two sisters on another occasion, as well as the message-carrying pigeons. Potter also changes Perrault's story to introduce more suspense by using folktale levels of repetition. Bluebeard tries three times to leave his keys with Fatima but succeeds only on the third try, and when Anne sends four

birds out, like Noah in his ark, only the fourth and last survives. Other folklore elements include a variation on the children's rhyme "Sticks and Stones," and a substantial sequence of stanzas from the old ballad of "The Twa Sisters." As this ballad is particularly prominent within Potter's tale—yet another instance of the mixing of different writings which goes on throughout the story—I reproduce its text and discuss its significance here.

The song is Wolfram's. Presumably, it is suggested to his memory by the presence of two sisters in the castle, the younger of whom has been earlier married than the other. But Wolfram never sings the first part of this widespread traditional ballad, which tells how a jealous older sister—because her lover has transferred his attentions to her younger sibling—takes the latter walking by the river, pushes her in, and leaves her to drown. Instead he sings a later sequence, in which a variation on the ancient narrative motif of the Singing Bone is introduced.[29] Every stanza that Wolfram sings seems calculated to frighten Fatima and Anne—and does have exactly that effect. But the song opens up other dimensions of the story as well, including giving an insight into Wolfram's thoughts, for the song is his meditation on both the violent deaths of his master's earlier wives, and the risks his master (and he) run of eventual exposure and retribution for their crimes.

The stanzas below occur in Potter's text in the following order and at first seem to be sung without relationship to their context. However, as the ballad progresses, it increasingly stresses related narrative events, which I note in brackets:

> What did he do with her breast bone?
> Down, down, hey down,
> He made him a violl to play thereon;
> Down, down, hey down! (45)
> . . .
> What did he do with her tongue so rough?
> Unto the violl it spake enough!
> What did he do with her nose ridge?
> Unto the violl he made it a bridge
> Down, down, hey down,
> What did he do with her fingers small?
> He made him pegs to his violl withall. (55)
> . . .
> What did he do with her two shins?
> Unto the violl they danced Mall Simms!
> Down, down, hey down. (105)
> . . .
> Then bespoke the treble string—
> "Oh, yonder is my father, the king!"
> Down, down, hey down!
> Then bespoke the second string—
> "Oh, yonder is my mother, the queen."
> Down, down, hey down. (106)

[At this point, Anne, seeking her sister, treads in the darkness on a bunch of keys lying on the floor (106).]

> Then bespoke the strings all three,
> "Oh, yonder is my sister, that drowned me." (106)
> . . .

[Anne sees her sister lying inside a doorway "like one dead" (109).]

> Now pay the miller for his pain,
> Down, down, hey down.
> And let him begone, in the devils name,
> Down, down, hey down. (109)

[Anne drags her sister away and locks the open door. Fortunately, Wolfram attributes the noise he hears to a cat (109–10).]

> The cat's behind the buttery shelf,
> Down, down, hey down.
> If you want any more you must sing it yourself!
> Down, hey down, hey down, oh! (110)

The song's anticipatory effect thus contributes particularly to narrative tension around the un-narrated scene of the opening of the bloody chamber. But the complete song (widely disseminated across Britain in many related versions, and still being sung and performed in the 1930s) also suggests a range of meanings which enrich Potter's tale. The ballad threatens Fatima with death and dismemberment and is a reminder of the original Bluebeard's mistreatment of his earlier wives' unburied bodies. As Wolfram's song, the ballad also complicates and gives depth to the frightening presence of this servant of the Baron's, in whom we begin to fear a threatening independence of action, perhaps even of criminal desire. Yet the "singing bone" motif, the ballad's theme of crime discovered, promises that the Baron's crimes will eventually be known and punished; this theme Wolfram, too, has cause to ponder. As a story of two sisters, on the other hand, the ballad has little to do with the story of Anne and Fatima. Rather, it works on the reader by contrast; Potter's sisters are not rivals, but loving and loyal. There is some ironic aptness in the idea that one sister may cause the death of the other, but in Potter's story Anne, the elder sister, willingly risks her own safety to save the life of the younger: a development that emphasizes sisterhood, womanly solidarity, Sister Anne's heroism, and the lasting affection, connectedness, and mutual responsibility of birth-family members even after siblings have married.

A feminist reading of *Sister Anne* is therefore certainly easy to perform: sisterhood is powerful. The more conventionally feminine sister Fatima—who welcomes marriage—would clearly be doomed in this story if not for the resilient and enterprising single woman, Anne, who herself survives and saves her sister by the same qualities as saved many a Bluebeard's last bride: courage, curiosity,

thinking ahead, quick wits, good luck, and assistance when she needs it from the birth family and the wider community. I feel quite astonished that this story went undiscovered by feminist fairy tale enthusiasts in the 1970s and '80s, for Potter's revisionary reading of Perrault, complicated by the folksong, creates a distinctive, and distinctively feminist, version of the tale. Moreover, Potter, in my view, uses her Bluebeard story to make a particular point about "gender relations" (Hermansson 146). Potter's *Sister Anne* is, I suggest, about violence within marriage, the widespread practice of wife-beating, and in particular, about the pattern of recurring domestic violence. Fatima's marriage evokes many wives' weird experience of depending for their happiness on a man who can and does repeatedly make their own home a hell; and, through Fatima's isolation and imprisonment, it also evokes the barriers to communication and escape, the complicit silence and secrecy, which often surround a battered wife and her marriage. The possibility that the story of Bluebeard might become a way of talking about this often unmentioned social phenomenon is surely obvious enough.

But the recurrent ebb and flow of domestic violence seems to have been generally shunned in the past as a possible interpretive framework for Bluebeard and related tales, and I think this shows readers' sound instinctive grasp of the trajectory of the story. To read Perrault's Bluebeard as an allegory of domestic violence would be quite at odds with the whole drama of the setting of the trap with the key, the innocent bride's opening of the forbidden chamber, her moment of horrified discovery, and the subsequent acting out of Bluebeard's secret but dangerous obsession, his compulsion to murder. Potter therefore changes her Fatima's experience in marriage considerably to produce a new understanding of the tale. Fatima's obsessive interest in a possible hidden chamber is an effect of her husband's bullying, violent ways and his threatening demeanor, and her compulsion is to have her worst fears confirmed; she does not semicomically succumb to the feminine failing of "curiosity." That Potter needed to change her story also explains why she uses as her most immediate intertext Thackeray's "Barbazure"—for Thackeray foregrounded a faithless wife, marital infidelity, and male jealousy in his parody, and passed over the forbidden chamber motif, which did not readily fit into his comic reconceptualization of the tale.

Three further pieces of evidence support my reading of marital violence as a proffered subtext to Potter's retelling of the tale type. The first is her creation of additional female characters who have earlier suffered from Bluebeard's violence: Marion, "nurse to the first wife's child" (53), who tried to escape the castle and was shot by a crossbow; Marion's elderly mother, who is now insane; and the cookmaid Elspeth, who is Marion's mother's sister and our informant. Just as, in Perrault, the bodies of Bluebeard's slaughtered wives hang like so many signs or dreadful portraits on the walls of his house, the marked bodies, boding words, and recorded sufferings of these three women intrude on Potter's narrative as so many signifiers of the Baron's past violence

to womankind. None of these informants was a wife, nor were they trapped by an obedience test; they simply fit into the pattern of the Baron's ordinary behavior toward women.

My second point is that my theory is supported by Potter's unusually realistic depiction of Bluebeard and his wife. Her Baron is no urbane man of property with a secret life as a pathological killer, but rather a publicly and habitually violent man whose day is passed in the markedly misogynist company of a band of professionally violent men. Daily conversation at the Baron's castle is often frightening, full of dark hints and obscurities and double-entendre. But it is never ironically theatrical like Perrault's Bluebeard's words to his wife. It is instead threatening, crude, and dismissively contemptuous of women.

Finally, Potter (who was, notably, a close associate of the local district nurse) rewrites the sufferings of her Fatima in such a way as to obliterate the prurient aspect of Perrault's tale, in which the young bride seems to be the more lovely in her vulnerability and fear. Potter's Fatima would have no power to "move a stone to tendernesss" with her beauty and emotional repentance like Perrault's young wife: she has dark marks under her eyes (37), is losing her bloom (96), and has become dull, nervous, and fretful. Fatima has also stopped looking after herself—it is mentioned that her kerchief and sleeves are soiled (94)—and after the shock of opening the forbidden chamber her condition deteriorates. She lies in bed moaning during the day, wakes up screaming at night, and is described as "a collapsed, pathetic figure" (115). From the day of her husband's return, she falls ill and starts wandering in her mind. This is a more consistent and detailed picture of a wife's reaction to a domestic reign of terror than any traditional fairy tale allows its audience.

I move on now to the final section of this essay, in which I argue the case for *Sister Anne* as a modernist text. One modern field in which this tale has importance, of course, is in twentieth-century women's revision of fairy tales, particularly their rewritings of popular fairy-tale heroines' roles as long-suffering victims: virtuous but passive, domestically enclosed, waiting for love, waiting to be rescued by a male. Potter herself might be generally understood as anti-feminist because of her inscription of traditional male and female roles in her children's tales, as well as her lack of enthusiasm for the suffragist campaigns. But here, perhaps with some self-mythologizing, she produces a sympathetic portrait of a heroine who is a strong-minded, courageous, competent, and energetic single woman, both an independent agent and an efficient organizer of others—a heroine whose motivation is love and generous concern for a weaker sister. In this respect, *Sister Anne* stands between Victorian women's and later twentieth-century feminist revisions of fairy tales. And Potter's radical difference in rewriting Sister Anne's role into that of a heroine is the more noteworthy because, as Casie Hermansson has shown, Sister Anne was a comic cross-dressed character in nineteenth-century English popular theatrical traditions. Anne's characteristics in melodramatic, pantomime, and burlesque

Bluebeard performances on stage, as well as in drawing-room and amateur productions, were her "frustrated wishes to marry" (usually expressed by her efforts to marry either Bluebeard or her sister's admirer instead); her taking on the role of the curious woman and encouraging her sister's disobedience; and her comical "maidenly coyness" (Hermansson 96–97). By the beginning of the twentieth century, says Hermansson, "the Bluebeard pantomime as Christmas fare had become thoroughly traditional" (129). Hermansson's book includes a photograph of American comedian Eddie Foy onstage (along with a two-man elephant) as Sister Anne in 1903 (130), which is a memorable pointer to a conception of this character which could hardly be more profoundly different from Potter's.

Another modern aspect of *Sister Anne* is its "mixing writings." One of its fields of reference is early Victorian, back to the comic and parodic "Barbazure," but its date of publication allies it to Modernist rewritings of traditional narratives: Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss," with its covert Bluebeard reference; James Joyce's relocation of the Homeric *Odyssey* to contemporary Dublin; D. H. Lawrence's biblical mythologizing in *The Rainbow*; even the mixed effects of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. My implication here—that we should align Potter's failed *Sister Anne* with great and the grand works of Modernism and ask what these books have in common—may sound astonishing. But *Sister Anne* shares with these and other modernist classics its overall air of experimentation, its purposeful inconsistency of tone and style, its undermining of fictional "character" by referring its characters to preexisting traditional (or burlesque) narratives, and its contesting in other ways the Victorian commitment to "truth to life" in fiction. Among *Sister Anne*'s many unsettling and "modern" practices is its high level of self-reference. Potter (like Joyce) achieves this by locating her story in a place she knew well and was widely associated with, and also by recalling her trademark tales of small animals by including a number of sympathetically portrayed animals in a story told by a mouse to mice.

Two scholars have already classed Potter as a modernist. Casie Hermansson discusses *Sister Anne* under the heading "Women Writing Modernist Fables" in her study of the English traditions of Bluebeard, along with Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Bluebeard's Daughter" (1940) and Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942). She notes that "[i]t is through Sister Anne's courage and presence of mind throughout that the sisters survive to escape," and describes how, to get her helpless sister Fatima to escape up into the turret of the castle, "Anne has to threaten her with pricks from a knife" (146). Katherine R. Chandler's essay "Thoroughly Post-Victorian, Pre-Modern Beatrix" cites Humphrey Carpenter's claim that Potter "belongs to the modern age rather than the Victorian" (qtd. in Chandler 287) and, referring to Potter's tendency to "make it new," sums up her innovations: "she modifies genre, liberates highly wrought illustration from fussiness, simplifies book format, hones writing to sparse precision, celebrates anti-heroes, fashions ironic narrators, surprises with unconventional conclusions, and rejects the cultural values of the Victorian age" (287).

On the other hand, Chandler does not see Potter as sharing the modernist tendency toward experimental innovation; she says there is never "a sense of experimentation for the sake of experimentation" (298). But I would say that *Sister Anne* is, precisely, an experiment in narration—especially when compared to earlier Victorian literary fairy tales, or to Potter's very popular signature writing style and product. I have often wondered whether the nineteenth-century folklore movement, which effectively undermined the authority of canonical versions of familiar and well-loved myths, legends, and other folk- (especially fairy) tales by collecting and publishing comparative studies of closely associated versions of the same tale type, did not have much to do with the development of Modernism in literature. Folklore threw the authority of the favorite old story into doubt, replacing it with a model of rival versions, widespread dissemination, change and variation in retellings. I am reminded of Graham Greene's dictum on Potter: "Her case is curiously similar to that of Henry James. Something happened which shook their faith in appearances" (qtd. in Chandler 305). This insight sounds very relevant to Potter's undertaking such a radically different revision of not just Perrault's Bluebeard, but of a flourishing narrative tradition of many Bluebeards, in her *Sister Anne*.[30] She resembles other twentieth-century women who would want to retell fairy tales in a more-or-less realist mode as a way of testing their "truth to life"—particularly their truth to the lives of women—while their revisions simultaneously tacitly acknowledge the recurrently performed, perpetually remade, anonymously self-applicable nature of fairy tales. I think there was something immediate and local, something *recognized* in "Bluebeard" by Potter, which inspired her most extensive experiment in fairy tale retelling, and drove her to replace a man's name, Bluebeard, with a woman's name, Sister Anne, on her title page.

Notes

1. *The Horn Book Magazine*, a critical review journal for children's books, first appeared in Boston in 1924; the first British children's book review journal was *The Junior Bookshelf*, 1936 (see Hunt 484.)

2. In order to secure British copyright, Potter had one hundred unbound copies of the American edition of *The Fairy Caravan* sent to her in England. When the copyright was secured, she gave many of the books away to local workers and friends, "who at once started identifying themselves, their houses and their animals in the book" (Taylor 170).

3. Sturges may also be known to readers as Katharine Sturges Dodge, and as the mother of author-illustrator Hilary Knight.

4. Charles Perrault's "La Barbe Bleue," the ultimate source of Potter's *Sister Anne*, is understood by folktale specialists to be a literary rewriting of a folktale, one of a widespread grouping of various related folk- and fairy tales of which many versions were collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of these have no supernatural element, but those that do are indexed as ATU 311 Rescue by the Sister and 312 Maiden-Killer (Bluebeard) in Hans-Jörg Uther's *The Types of International Folktales* (2004).

5. Lane's full comment in *The Tale of Beatrix Potter* (1946) reads: "Varlets, barbicans and palfreys dismally abound; there is not one natural touch in the book, not one gleam of vitality anywhere to suggest its authorship; it is a pretentious failure" (139). Margaret Drabble comments that those of Potter's books "later written for the US, such as *The Fairy Caravan* (1928), are of little interest" (781).

6. According to Leslie Linder, "Anne Carroll Moore, a children's librarian in New York, criticized *Sister Anne* unfavorably; but Beatrix Potter said, 'I did not agree with her objection to *Sister Anne*—which I re-read with enjoyment and detached interest, whereas I am sick of *Peter Rabbit*!!'" (325).

7. Goldthwaite's discussion of Potter in *The Natural History of Make-Believe* evokes readers such as these as he makes the important point that Potter is (despite contrary claims) capable of sentiment, prettiness, preciousness, whimsy, "retreat to the nursery" and even insipidity (289–90). "[T]here are, when you come to inquire, enough dear littles and teeny-weenys to satisfy the most doting grandmother," says Goldthwaite, who also claims that Potter knew "those maiden aunts" to be "her real audience for a book like *The Tailor of Gloucester*" (289). I have never understood precisely what is so wrong with sentiment, or with the sweet and pretty, nor why evoking infancy and its culture and communicative codes should be a deplorable effect in literature for children. The "elves and fairies, mice pushing perambulators, guinea pigs snuggling in sewing baskets" which Goldthwaite finds so embarrassing (290), in my view, present a much more forgivable fantasy world than—for example—many science fiction stories, with their wooden and predictable characters and their stereotypical ideas about gender.

8. All further page references to *The Tailor of Gloucester* are to this edition.

9. See chapter three of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), where he claims that perhaps "a hundred" paintings of women in the whole of the Western tradition of depictions of "more or less naked" women escape from "the implication that the subject (a woman) is aware of being seen by a spectator [a man]" (57; 49). In fact, the whole of this chapter is relevant to Potter's play with her male and female mouse figures in *Tailor*. See, for instance, "to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision—a sight" (46–47). Berger further suggests that the "real function of the mirror [in depictions of a woman symbolizing vanity] was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (51). His emphasis on the "confined space" allotted to women seems to speak loudly to the tiny framed spaces within which Potter's mouse characters disport themselves in *Tailor*.

10. Lissa Paul wonders if the lady mouse might be sitting on an elaborately sequined and embroidered cushion (64). But the waistcoat was identified by Margaret Lane in *The Tale of Beatrix Potter*, where this picture is captioned in Potter's own words: "The pictures of the embroidered waistcoat . . . were drawn from show-case specimens in the 'V. and A.' which are probably still there" (160). The resemblance of this piece of clothing to the waistcoat with pocket—I assume it's a fob pocket—shown on page 55 of *The Tailor of Gloucester* is very strong—the Victoria and Albert waistcoats

presumably having provided Potter's model for each of these pictures. The mouse in the background of this picture must be at work inside the pocket, presumably finishing the edges of a seam. Note that the background color here is a muted monotone, so as to set off the delicate pale colors in the lady mouse's clothing.

11. And, I believe, cut from scraps of the same cherry-colored silk and cream satin.

12. Readers might also connect these narrating, spinning mice with the frontispiece illustration to Charles Perrault's publication in 1697 of his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé: Avec des Moralitez*, original source of the classic fairy tale of Bluebeard. It shows an older woman, distaff in hand, entertaining three children with her tale-telling by the fireside; a copy of the 1729 English translation's version of this picture is reproduced in Iona and Peter Opie's *The Classic Fairy Tales* (23).

13. See Lear, Illustration 31 (among the plates bound between pages 236 and 237). The design was intended as an illustration for a booklet of the nursery rhyme later used in *The Tailor of Gloucester*, "Three little mice sat down to spin." In *Tailor*, Potter's illustrations on pages 42, 45, and 46, where Simpkin interrupts and frightens away the singing and sewing mice, again refer to this song, which the "rude little mice" sing to tease him (47). The work done by Potter for this abortive project is discussed at Nos. 1066–89 in Hobbs and Whalley, *Beatrix Potter: The V & A Collection* (121–23). The pictures are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection.

14. See Goldthwaite 297–317 for a discussion of Potter's reading, and of how she became "the innovative translator of folklore that she was" (292).

15. Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index* refers "F346.1 Fairies make shoes for shoemaker" to Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm's Tale 39 in their *Kinder und Hausmärchen*. The tale, called "The Elves: First Story," can be found in Ralph Manheim's translation, *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old* (143–45). At a small 2010 exhibition of Potter's works in a shop in the vicinity of Gloucester Cathedral, I discovered that local tradition still preserves records of the "true story" behind the plot of *The Tailor of Gloucester*; a number of local residents had provided their version of this story to the organizers of the exhibition.

16. Both tales were published by Leslie Linder in 1971 (see 360–63 and 364–74). Like *Sister Anne*, these are expanded retellings of Perrault, loaded with colorful, realistic, and localizing touches. Potter makes changes (Cinderella's stepmother is an admirable character and the two step-sisters are the villains) but she retains the Perrault endings, so that both grandmother and Red Riding Hood are eaten by the wolf. In general, Perrault's plots in both these tales have undergone fewer changes than resulted from the expansion of Sister Anne's role in Potter's "Bluebeard" retelling. Potter also sketched and painted illustrations of Cinderella going to the ball in which the pumpkin coach is drawn by three pairs of rabbits; in a self-referential detail, rabbits also draw Cinderella's coach in the text of the tale published by Linder. Other illustrations for fairy tales ("Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Sleeping Beauty") are cataloged by Hobbs and Whalley; see Nos. 977 and 978 (108).

17. Examples of this kind of character are Marian Halcombe in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and George Eliot's heroines Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Dorothea Brooke and Mary Garth in *Middlemarch* (1871–72). The prototypes are probably Walter Scott's impressive dark heroines, like Flora MacIvor in *Waverley* (1814) or Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* (1819).

18. This traditional female resident in Bluebeard's home is described in my 2002 article, "Anti-Housewives and Ogres' Housekeepers: The Roles of Bluebeard's Female Helper."

19. Ritchie was popular in her day. The first edition of *Bluebeard's Keys* (1874) had a second edition in 1875, and reappeared with the same publishers in volume five of the *Works of Miss Thackeray* (1876), and in *Works. Selections* (1890). The *Works of Miss Thackeray* in ten volumes (a reprint) appeared between 1875 and 1908, and a Tauchnitz edition (Leipzig, 1875) was reprinted in the early twentieth century, c.1910.

20. Anne Thackeray, Lady Ritchie generally gave her realistically rewritten fairy tales a contemporary setting. Elizabeth Gaskell's story "The Grey Woman," which originally appeared as a serial in 1861 in *All the Year Round*, is historical, set in the era of the French Revolution. It is recognizably a traditional tale of the Robber Bridegroom type (see Lovell-Smith 203–04) and is therefore very like a Bluebeard story, but lacking in supernatural elements. The character of Amante, the Gaskell heroine's companion, maid, helper, and rescuer, whose strength of mind, capability, courage, and quick wits save both herself and her mistress, resembles that of Potter's Sister Anne.

21. As Casie Hermansson has shown, the Bluebeard story was first thoroughly "orientalized" (51) in 1798 by a British collaboration between Michael Kelly, an Irish composer and tenor, and George Colman the Younger, a theater manager, who together produced the libretto for an opera called *Blue Beard, or Female Curiosity*, based on an existing Parisian opera, *Raoul Barbe Bleue*, by André Modeste Grétry (Hermansson 51; see also 55–56, 60–66). In naming Bluebeard's wife Fatima and equipping the Bluebeard character with turban, Turkish trousers, scimitar, and so forth, this highly successful production profoundly influenced popular and chapbook ideas of Bluebeard in nineteenth-century Britain, and the name "Fatima" stuck to Bluebeard's wife on- and offstage thereafter (51–54).

22. Subsequently renamed "Novels by Eminent Hands," the series, which originally appeared in twenty numbers of *Punch* between 3 April and 9 October 1847, was also published with other Thackeray works in the United States in 1853, and in *Miscellanies II* in 1856, as well as in a separate edition, together with "Character Sketches," in 1856. That Potter should hark back to this slight—though inventive and highly entertaining—tale in 1932 is a reminder that in many ways she remained a Victorian, having been born in 1866; if her writing career coincides with early Modernism, it is because she was thirty-six years old before she published her first book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, in 1902.

23. Potter's Bluebeard character, like Thackeray's, is a Baron, and her Baron Bluebeard's "azure beard" is specifically mentioned (*Sister Anne* 115). Potter makes her Bluebeard a robber baron and predator, like Thackeray's, who "levied toll upon the river and mail upon the shore" (Thackeray 504); Potter's Bluebeard has committed crimes of great cruelty in the past, also like Thackeray's (504). Thackeray's baron resembles Potter's in physique, as, "though middle-aged," he is very active and energetic (505). In addition, both young wives adhere to tradition in being called Fatima, both have a traditionally-named Sister Anne, and Thackeray's Fatima, like Potter's, is kept a prisoner in her own home, living (at one stage) on bread and water. The most significant resemblance is that Potter, like Thackeray, does not narrate the opening of the bloody chamber. Otherwise, Potter in general keeps much more closely to Perrault's plot than does Thackeray, who adds a love triangle and lover's rescue to the story.

24. As seen in note 5 above, Margaret Lane singled out Potter's medievalized language for adverse comment (139).

25. "Palfrey" means an ordinary riding horse as opposed to a warhorse, often a smaller horse suited to a woman; "sumpter" means the mare is a packhorse. "Destrière," on the other hand, may be one of Thackeray's many deliberate mistakes: the word is usually "destrier," warhorse. Like the palfrey Gilibert rides, and the pink armor donned by Romané in his role as an Ivanhoe-ish mystery knight, "destrière" seems to have a feminizing implication. Thus, interestingly enough, both of Thackeray's medieval heroes seem to be sensitive sissies, while his Bluebeard is a stalwart, virile and indefatigable warrior—even excessively so.

26. Linda Lear quotes a letter from Potter: "'The "Ginger & Pickle" book has been causing amusement,' Beatrix reported to Millie. 'It has got a good many views which can be recognized in the village which is what they like, they are all quite jealous of each others houses & cats getting into a book'" (230). Lear also reports that one elderly neighbor who hoped to see himself represented in a Potter book once told Potter that "he thought 'he might pass as a dormouse'" (230).

27. In the Grimms' "Bluebeard"-related tale, "The Robber Bridegroom," the bride-to-be, curious enough to visit her betrothed's home "in the dark forest," is warned by a bird in a cage hanging on the wall: "Go home, young bride, go home,/ To a murderer's house you've come" (147). In another instance of a helpful animal—from a "Bluebeard" variant collected in the Vendée—the wife's little dog, called Sarène, plays a Sister Anne kind of role, watching at an upstairs window while the husband is sharpening his knives below to cut his wife's throat: "Sarène, Sarène, can you see any one coming on the road to Paris?"/ "Oh, no, Madam, I can see the dusty woods and the barren earth" (Bødker, Hole, and d'Aronco158). Instances of both of these helpful animals are found across a range of "Bluebeard"-related tales.

28. "Gled," another northern and Scottish word, means a bird of prey—usually a kite. Earlier, the Baron's "hawklike" nose is mentioned (*Sister Anne* 9).

29. Beatrix Potter's version of the ballad "The Twa Sisters" closely but not entirely resembles A, the oldest (1656) recorded version of the ballad in Francis James Child's 1882–98 collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (126). Child remarks: "This is one of the very few old ballads not extinct as tradition in the British Isles. Even drawing-room versions are spoken of as current" (118). Potter may have recorded the words of the song from memory, drawn on a published copy of the ballad, or adjusted Child's text A in line with her own memory of the song in performance. The musical instrument made of the bones of a murdered person which later identifies the murderer recurs as both the basis of a folktale and as a short motif within longer folktales; Child discusses the widely distributed motif of the truth-telling harp of bones on 121–26. There is a related story about a Singing Bone in the Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, No. 28; the tale type number in Uther's *Types of International Folk Tales* is ATU 780. In Thompson's *Motif-Index*, the motif is cataloged as "E632 Reincarnation as Musical Instrument. The Singing Bone."

30. Graham Greene's essay "Beatrix Potter" is reprinted in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*. For the history of the many related traditions flourishing in Bluebeard retellings, see Hermansson.

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